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THE REALIZATION OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1992/11 of 21 February 1992, the Commission on Human Rights requested the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to undertake a study on human rights and extreme poverty and, in particular, of the following aspects:

(a) The effects of extreme poverty on the enjoyment and exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of those experiencing it;

(b) The efforts of the poorest themselves to achieve the exercise of those rights and to participate fully in the development of the society in which they live;

(c) The conditions in which the poorest may effectively convey their experience and their thoughts and become partners in the realization of human rights;

(d) The means of ensuring a better understanding of the experience and thoughts of the poorest and of the persons working with them ...

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2. The Secretary-General has received the attached contribution prepared by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category I).

I. EXTREME POVERTY: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHAMPIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

1. According to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy ... freedom from fear and want" is rightly proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people. The preamble thus reflects and endorses the aspiration of all those who, throughout history, have attached prime importance to this challenge of eradicating want. In linking the proclamation of human rights and liberation from want, it points to the course to be followed: the identification of want as a violation of fundamental human rights and efforts to secure the attainment of those rights for all.

2. The Commission on Human Rights has clearly embarked upon this course in meeting the request made in 1987 by Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, for a study on the topic of human rights and extreme poverty. The Commission has emphasized in successive resolutions the need for a better understanding of extreme poverty and its impact on the exercise of human rights. It has stated that if such a study is to achieve its purpose, it must be carried out with the participation of the poorest themselves and of those continuously associated with them.

3. Again in 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski proposed to the international community a universal definition of extreme poverty drafted for the first time in terms of human rights and emphasizing that the precarious living conditions of the poor could lead to irreversible situations. "Precariousness is the absence of one or more of the safety factors enabling individuals and families to meet their basic responsibilities and enjoy their fundamental rights. The resulting insecurity may be of shorter or longer duration and its effects may be more or less serious and permanent. It most often leads to serious poverty when it affects several areas of life, tends to become prolonged and persistent and seriously undermines the possibilities for the independent reattainment of rights and reassumption of responsibilities in a foreseeable future". 1/

4. A few months later, on 17 October 1987, on the Parvis des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme at the Trocadéro in Paris he unveiled a stone on which he had placed an inscription reflecting the repudiation of want by all champions of human rights: "Where human beings are condemned to live in want, human rights are violated. It is a sacred duty to unite to secure respect for those rights".

II. THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD: A CONTRIBUTION

5. To eradicate want: this is the goal of those who, throughout the world and in many organizations, have associated themselves with the most marginalized peoples. Like them and often with them, the permanent

volunteers of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, founded by Father Joseph Wresinksi (1917-1988), have joined the poorest themselves in efforts to ensure that all their human brothers will one day be spared the misery of want.

6. In connection with the study on human rights and extreme poverty, we thought it important to report what 35 years of association between families living in extreme poverty and the International Movement ATD Fourth World have revealed regarding the conditions for their participation. In these few pages, we concentrate on the conditions for the necessary participation of the poorest in reaching an understanding of extreme poverty.

A still incomplete understanding of extreme poverty

7. The majority view is that - to the extent that understanding is the key to solutions and ideas - a thorough understanding of extreme poverty would pave the way for the eradication of want and hence for a human community in which human rights are observed without any exclusions.

8. Having recognized the need for a deeper understanding of extreme poverty, several international bodies have assumed undertakings and have raised funds for the purpose.

9. For instance, the Executive Board of UNICEF, in two decisions entitled "Reaching the poorest" in 1989 and 1991, has affirmed that a more thorough knowledge of the situation of the poorest children and their families is necessary if programmes are to reach them.

10. In a series of resolutions entitled "Human rights and extreme poverty", the Commission on Human Rights has constantly stressed the need for a better understanding of extreme poverty and its impact on the exercise of human rights. It has requested the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to give attention more particularly to the conditions in which the poorest themselves and those working with them can convey their experience and so contribute to a better understanding of the reality of their lives and its causes (resolutions 1989/10, 1990/15, 1991/14 and 1992/11).

11. The General Assembly of the United Nations, in resolution 46/12 of 17 December 1991 stressed in the same terms the need for a thorough study of extreme poverty based on the understanding which the poorest themselves can convey.

12. Similarly, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe included a project entitled "Human dignity and social exclusion", in its intergovernmental programme of work for 1991. This project, which was confirmed in 1992, provides for a novel approach to understanding, mainly aimed at listening to those living in poverty and giving them an opportunity to speak.

13. So far, all of us have only a partial understanding, in that it is filtered through minds generally formed in backgrounds which are not very receptive to the experience of the poorest.

14. How then is progress to be made in eradicating want if efforts to reach an understanding of the poorest effectively fail to take the poorest themselves into account? Their actual participation is necessary, because the experience of research-workers, experts and all those concerned in one way or another with questions relating to the poorest shows that information developed solely in the light of their own predetermined criteria ultimately leads only to a knowledge that cannot withstand criticism based on the unique experience of the poorest. Those best placed to talk about the attacks on fundamental rights resulting from extreme poverty and about the means to be adopted for their eradication are the very people who experience these situations of injustice and those who are working closely with them, are recognized by them as spokesmen and interpreters, and are therefore qualified witnesses. If, to use the forceful language of Father Joseph Wresinski, "for those foreign to the environment", the living conditions of the poorest are "incomprehensible" 2/ (p. 73), it is essential for "knowledge" to pass through the crucible of their experience.

The experience of Father Joseph: an initiative designed to establish the conditions for participation of the poorest

15. Participation of the poorest is not only essential; it must be envisaged from the outset. 3/ The International Movement ATD Fourth World has endorsed this view on the strength of the experience of one man: Father Joseph Wresinski. It has enabled those who have supported his initiative to "sense dumb misery, and meet the eyes of these men", 4/ women and children whose surroundings all conspire to conceal or mask their face.

16. Nowhere in the world does a visit to the poor quarters, shanty towns or slums yield an immediate understanding of the poorest. Leaving aside the distress caused by the suffering and the faces we encounter, how are we to view the situation? How are we to interpret what we see? How are we even to detect the most neglected elements inside or outside a population that is already so deprived? The usual methods of obtaining information: interviews, surveys, the compilation of statistics and sociological analyses, etc., must of necessity be supplemented if there is to be any prospect of appreciating and understanding what the weakest families actually experience. 5/

17. As we shall see, the experience of Father Joseph has both laid down a path and shown us how to follow it: it enables us to come close to the life and the thinking of the poor and, above all, it leaves us with the lines of communication (cf. p. 167), which are still vitally necessary to us.

18. Father Joseph proposes and leads us towards a change of outlook, a radical transformation of points of view. In revealing that "born in poverty (he) learned to see the world from below", and in stating that when "you look 'from below', what you see is different from when you are used to seeing the world from above, from an ivory tower or from a garret", 6/ he made it altogether clear from what point of view he was speaking.

19. Born in 1917 of a Polish father and a Spanish mother, Joseph Wresinski spent all his childhood in a poor part of Angers (France) where he suffered the humiliation and shame that come of excessive poverty.

20. When then, on becoming a priest and being sent by his bishop to a camp for the homeless, in Noisy-le-Grand (France), one day in July 1956, he did not find himself among strangers. He immediately felt at home in this no-man's-land, and indeed recognized himself in these people who had ended up on the outskirts of the Paris area: "The families I met there brought to my mind the hardship suffered by my mother, and the children teeming around me in those first moments, they were my brothers, they were my sisters, they were me, 40 years earlier, in rue Saint-Jacques, in Angers". 7/

21. In the first few days after his arrival in Noisy-le-Grand, "the grinding poverty revealed before (my) eyes in the suffocating heat and total silence" (p. 69) reflected "the realm of adversity" 8/ which he was entering. Families were there, cooped in fibro-cement shelters, rejected by everyone. Who would have thought it possible to break down the walls of this prison?

22. Years later, when it proved impossible to undertake any description, Father Joseph wrote: "I lived in an unbearable situation with the families. (...) It was unbearable because it lasted. Six months would have been bearable; one year was no longer bearable, and after two years one could only have revolted or simply let go and sunk with the rest of them" (p. 152). The reality can be felt behind the restrained language: it was there, unavoidably there for these poor people, without resources or support, unrecognized by the outside world, left to themselves, without role or connections. A poor man in the world of the poor, he was exposed like them to approbrium. Worse: to indifference, to non-existence ... "Born into poverty, remaining still as a man, in (his) heart of hearts, in a state of poverty" (p. 69), he chose to stay with this people, who were his people: a people marked by poverty and courage but whom society saddles with so many names ("hopeless cases", "parasites", "social cases" ...) that they find themselves completely discredited, sometimes even in their own eyes, and so to speak denied any dignity or identity (cf. p. 56).

23. "Faced with the most utter destitution in which these families lived" (p. 17), Father Joseph had "a very strong feeling that it was (his) duty to break down the prison walls" (p. 153) around those who had thus been left at the mercy of poverty. An association thus came into being which served as "a way of sharing the daily horror" and of surmounting "the fear of sinking together" (p. 152). Could this initial union of a few families, founded on "a shared experience of life" (p. 152) survive the hellish solitude afflicting the camp: "What could we do, the families and myself, if men and women who shared our desire to put an end to poverty and the shame attaching to it, did not rally to our side? (...) I very soon realized that we would achieve nothing alone" (pp. 152-153). Thus it was that, from amidst the dust and mud, the Movement ATD Fourth World emerged as a meeting place and rallying point for all those who reject poverty, including, first and foremost, the poorest people themselves.

24. There are many people who are committed to helping the very poor. What is specific about Joseph Wresinski's action, however, is that it comes "from below". Knowing from the inside the world of poverty in which he was to put down his roots, he could see, and allow others to see, that which is extremely difficult to discern, namely courage and a rejection of the unbearable fate suffered by these families. He could make all those whom he encountered

understand the extent to which, in order to change things, and to change the world, it was not only possible but essential to rely on the inner resources of the poorest people and their deep determination to find a way out.

III. THE KNOWLEDGE BORN OF ON-THE-SPOT INVOLVEMENT

A way of being

25. To do this, Father Joseph, quite paradoxically but as a matter of basic necessity, agreed to be powerless. "The Fourth World asked new things of us, one had to be like a white page whereon families could write what they had to say. One had to be open, completely receptive, and to accept that these families were our masters" (p. 162). "Being like a white page" was a necessity and it remains so whenever anything begins. It means learning the way from others and then helping them to advance along it and not to go astray.

26. What indeed is more fundamental than the analytical tools, programmes and projects needed for any action, is an experience which sweeps all arguments aside: "We did not know what lay in wait for us, if we really allowed ourselves to be carried along by life, true to our resolve that the injustice should end" (p. 154). The one sure thing is that "everything was the result of a shared experience of life, never of a theory" (p. 152).

27. The demand was then 9/ for a way of being. Wanting to turn the poorest people into "participants" is not a matter of orders or of strategy or of method ...: "Don't see me as a champion of participationism before the term was coined. I was one of them, I belonged to their community. I was cold, I was hungry, like them" (p. 151).

28. When one has become aware that it is difficult to "understand extremely poor people in the aggregate, in terms of their background and experience of life" (p. 71), and that sometimes indeed "the inability to understand them becomes a refusal to understand them" (p. 76), the main thing is to recognize the basis of our common fate as it is expressed, for instance, in the African adage: "Every man is a man" - which instils in us a spirit of respect and trust and leads us to a way of being in which the humanity of each very poor family can assume its full meaning.

A long-term commitment

29. What Father Joseph was to write later about the ATD Fourth World voluntary service provides a good description of his own quite radical experience: the fight against poverty "will not be up to governments alone, it will also be up to individuals who are willing to walk side by side with the outcasts, to link their life to their lives, and sometimes to give everything up in order to share their fate" (p. 15). This attitude of total dedication is absolutely necessary in so far as "a group of people who have all too long been repressed are deeply distrustful of all those who attempt to get near them". 10/ How then can we "know the hopes of the poorest man" except "by having dealings with him over a long period of time" (p. 217)?

30. There is a very strong link between knowing a group of people and being present among them, "caringly, continuously present", 11/ which is regarded as a precondition for knowledge and which is an earnest commitment. This continuance begets trust, without which there can be no knowledge that goes beyond appearances and hasty interpretations.

31. This way of being present, of biding one's time and waiting, is what Father Joseph calls "a shared experience of life", enlisting his energies in "a bid to combat this poverty" (p. 152).

32. After his lone beginnings, a few volunteers joined him, and not just to lend a helping hand during their holidays, but truly "resolved to dedicate their lives to fighting" along with these families (p. 16) "against the unjust fate imposed upon them". 12/ Through their presence, their commitment, and their conviction that they should participate in the "battle being waged by the poor and wretched of the earth for their dignity and liberation", 13/ they have become key witnesses. And since everywhere in the world men and women had already joined, or were then joining, this movement to put an end to poverty, Father Joseph became obsessed by the idea that none of them, wherever they might be and whatever form their actions might take, should remain in isolation or should ever one day lose heart. By being present among very poor people and thereby developing their understanding, they are acquiring real knowledge of the incredible story of those who are rejected by everybody, both in the present and in the past. They are so to speak mediators between this unknown world and those who everywhere are concerned to see things change in our projects and policies. They are witnesses: they see and know; they need to tell and transmit. Witnesses of the poorest and recognized by them as such.

33. They are like channels that make it possible, firstly, to guard against the "danger of exploiting, misappropriating and paralysing the poor", 14/ automatically entailed by any work of analysis; and, secondly, to ensure that the knowledge thus obtained has a really "mobilizing, action-inducing effect" and that it is not used as mere information "for a purpose extraneous to the real-life situation, a purpose that (the poorest people themselves) have not chosen and that they would never have defined in the same way as the researcher". 15/

Drawing support from the strength of the poorest

34. At that early stage, the main thing was "to share the suffering of people". 16/ For "if we do not share the suffering of people, ... we cannot share their strength, and then they will not be able to join us, since they will not believe in our sincerity". It is this communion which can open a breach in a future which seems closed.

35. A breach which can liberate, not only those reached by various projects, but also, and in particular, those who are not. Have we not forgotten to "seek out and consult the poorest? ... Are projects really prepared in conjunction with them?" (p. 217). These were the questions continually asked by Father Joseph, who had in mind the most deprived, weakest member of a community, the very person of whom nothing is expected because he is the scorn of the whole neighbourhood.

36. This brings us to the crux of the requirement towards which the founder of ATD Fourth World was leading: priority to the poorest. This does not simply mean priority for Fourth World in the lives of those wishing to become involved with it, but doing what is necessary to make "the most downtrodden, most broken, most scorned family in the street or neighbourhood the cornerstone of the presence of a team and of all its efforts" (p. 178). It is precisely the weakest family that must become "the basis of our thinking" (p. 211); it is "(its) expectation (that must be taken) as a reference point for any action" (p. 209), its ideas as "basic expertise" (p. 217). Otherwise, as pointed out earlier, the participation of the worst outcasts will "never be obtained along the way" (p. 121).

37. Doesn't this represent a "revolution in thinking and in attitude towards the individual", in that it involves our society, "identifying wholly with the demands of the poorest" (p. 209)? Might it not be because this priority is not recognized as essential that the various aid programmes do not really reach the poorest and poverty persists, thwarting the realization of human rights for all, without any exception?

Learning from the poorest

38. But how can we hope to identify with the aspirations of the weakest while at the same time taking it upon ourselves to "think for them, thus ruling out any original contribution from them" (p. 230)? To avoid this contradiction, we must learn from them. "The poor are our teachers, not only instructing us, but changing our perceptions as well. Those who we have thought of as witless have a unique experience to communicate to us". 17/

39. And again: "Who better than these people who have experienced it to know what oppresses and destroys the individual? If we listened to families in the subproletarian neighbourhoods ... their experience could teach us what justice and freedom really are ... Those most paralysed by poverty have a unique contribution to make to our thinking and our practices regarding democracy, partnership and Godly and worldly matters". 18/

40. How could we understand these families without listening to them or letting them speak? Without learning from them what their lives are like, not in a documentary fashion, but to get a worm's eye view? And how will we consult those who are weakened even more than everyone else by major political conflicts, wars, putsches or embargos? Those who, when the crisis has passed, appear to others as a population too weak to make any contribution?

41. This listening approach, which is necessary because there is no possible alternative, is not intimist but rather a state of mind which can impregnate thinking, encounters, projects and actions, not only of any person wishing to become involved with the poorest, but of the international community itself.

42. The International Movement ATD Fourth World has been built step by step on the passionate conviction that we must try to "make every effort to understand the desires of the poorest, to learn what they are saying and why they are saying it" (p. 217), since "it is not for us, but for the poorest, to dictate the priorities" (p. 85).

43. All that, as stated earlier, has a historical, not a theoretical, basis. Very shortly after his arrival at Noisy-le-Grand, Father Joseph succeeded in achieving freedom of association and in getting the most deprived families to speak for themselves. This did not mean neglecting economic rights. It involved choosing priorities, with families, according to their own experience. For he knew that they would obtain no fundamental right, nothing lasting, if they could not themselves convey how they lived, what they were thinking, what they were capable of and what their hopes were. 19/

44. Gradually, the fourth world peoples universities were set up as places where poor and non-poor could meet and where, on the basis of the experience of the most deprived, a school of citizenship was developed for the teaching of individual and collective expression, listening and dialogue, mutual consultations, sharing of knowledge etc.

An all-embracing presence

45. In the foregoing pages, particular emphasis has been laid on the "internal" dimension of the conditions for ensuring the participation of the poorest, since it is the foundation of all the rest.

46. But we must not overlook the fact that, from the very beginning of his time at the Noisy-le-Grand camp, Father Joseph was haunted by the need to understand and communicate. This obsession was even a factor throughout the course of his life and his time spent with the people of the fourth world everywhere. In the mud of Noisy-le-Grand, he was concerned with setting up a research institute, as "it was not sufficient to proclaim (what we were experiencing) with our hearts; it must be made understandable to men of today" (p. 17); and he convened the first anti-poverty symposia at UNESCO in 1961 and 1964. His overriding concern was to bring together experience acquired in the field and all those who, in one way or another, had also acquired some knowledge of the poorest.

47. In order to achieve any progress towards enabling a whole people to discover or rediscover its identity and ways of contributing to the building of societies, Father Joseph had to invent and create numerous activities in conjunction with the poorest themselves, including family pre-schools, "art and poetry" as cultural linchpins, street and field libraries, workshops and craft centres, and fourth world peoples universities, but without ever allowing those activities to obscure the main goal, namely, the liberation of these "people outside all the worlds which others had built for themselves". 20/

Being present, as an equal, wherever men are speaking ...

48. On his arrival at the Noisy-le-Grand camp and seeing the hellish conditions in which the inhabitants were living, Father Joseph became convinced that "these families ... will never escape unaided" (p. 19), that "these people would never escape from their poverty until they were accepted collectively as a people in places where other men discussed and debated. It had to be present, as an equal, wherever men talk and decide not only about the present, but about the destiny of the individual and the future of mankind" (p. 69). It was then that he vowed to himself that he would "take

them up the steps of the Elysée, the Vatican, the United Nations and the great international organizations. They must become full partners" (p. 19). He added "some will think of this as a ridiculous fancy conceived on this arid plateau in mid-summer 1956!" (p. 19).

49. A fancy which was to involve countless destitute families and vast numbers of individuals from all walks in bringing this injustice to an end.

Notes

1/ Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale, report submitted on behalf of the Conseil économique et social by Joseph Wresinski and adopted on 11 February 1987, in Journal Officiel, Avis et Rapports du Conseil économique et sociale, 6(1987), 28 February 1987, p. 25.

2/ The page numbers in the body of the text refer to the book by Father Joseph Wresinski, Les Pauvres sont l'Eglise (entretiens avec Gilles Anouil), Paris, éd du centurion (Coll. "Les interviews"), 1983.

3/ Cf. Father Joseph Wresinski, "Une connaissance qui conduise au combat", Quart Monde, No. 140 (1991), pp. 44-52.

4/ Father Joseph Wresinski, Heureux vous les pauvres, Paris, éd. Cana, 1984, p. 25.

5/ Cf. Father Joseph Wresinski, Une connaissance qui conduise au combat, art. cit.

6/ Father Joseph Wresinski, quoted by Eugene Notermans, loc. cit. p. 53.

7/ Father Joseph Wresinski, 1984 commentary to the film "Rue des fleurs", made in 1962.

8/ Ibid.: "On 14 July 1956 I entered the realm of adversity".

9/ It will already have been noticed that there is no consistency in the use of tenses here: the past gives way to the present and vice versa. The reason is that Father Joseph's experience is so to speak the paradigm (which, it is true, precludes neither invention nor self-reliance) of what we, as permanent volunteers with ATD Fourth World, have to experience - not in the sense that the ground covered has continually to be covered again, but in the radical sense that his experience is a kind of "asset" which we must internalize and on the basis of which, at the same time, we must create something new.

10/ Barcelona lecture, 2 October 1981, Igloos, No. 113 (1982), p. 128.

11/ Father Joseph Wresinski, "La Science, parente pauvre de la charité", introduction to Jean Labbens, La Condition sous-prolétarienne. L'héritage du passé, Pierrelaye, ed. Science et Service, 1965, pp. 31-32.

12/ Father Joseph Wresinski, A la gloire du Quart Monde de tous les temps, stanzas addressed to the world on 17 October 1987 on the occasion of the inauguration of the memorial to the victims of poverty (Paris, Trocadéro). The full text is published in Quart Monde, No. 125 (1987), pp. 2-3.

13/ Father Joseph Wresinski, commentary to the film "Rue des fleurs", quoted above.

14/ Father Joseph Wresinski, "Une connaissance qui conduise au combat", loc. cit., p. 47.

15/ Ibid.

16/ Father Joseph Wresinski, 1984, archives, ATD Fourth World.

17/ Quoted by Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk, in Le Père Joseph, un chemin d'unité pour les hommes, op. cit., p. 30.

18/ Quoted by Alwine van Steenwijk, ibid. pp. 29-30.

19/ Cf. Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk, Dossiers de Pierrelave, March-April 1990, 158 pp., internal document.

20/ Father Joseph Wresinski, "Les plus pauvres, révélateurs de l'indivisibilité des Droits de l'Homme", in 1989, Les Droits de l'Homme en questions, (Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme), Paris, La Documentation française 1989, p. 222.

Annex

POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD TO THE STUDY ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXTREME POVERTY

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is prepared to make its services available to the Commission on Human Rights in order to assist the Commission in carrying out its study. The Movement has the following resources at its disposal for this purpose:

1. Direct contributions by individuals, families and population groups living in extreme poverty, who are able to bear valuable witness.

(a) Teams of permanent volunteers of the International Movement ATD Fourth World operate in areas of poverty in 25 industrialized and developing countries in four continents. They have kept the poorest families regularly informed of the progress of action by the Commission on Human Rights. Most of these teams have had discussions on this subject with people who are extremely poor, both on a face-to-face basis in personal talks and on a collective basis, at large and small meetings. The Movement is thus in a position to furnish direct testimony concerning actual cases of deprivation of human rights and to give the views of the persons concerned on their situation and what they consider it most important to protect in order to preserve the human dignity of all those concerned.

(b) The Standing Forum on Extreme Poverty Throughout the World, whose secretariat is provided by the Movement, is a network extending over more than 100 countries which includes individuals and local non-governmental organizations that work in the field with groups of poverty-stricken families. The individuals and non-governmental organization members of this Forum make it possible for the Movement to disseminate and transmit the testimony of the families whose hopes they share.

(c) The most poverty-stricken communities themselves, local meetings, the Fourth World Peoples' Universities (see para. 11 above), and the regional, national and international congresses organized by the Movement in different parts of the world provide opportunities for studying extreme poverty and for the participation of those suffering from it and for the expression of their views on all matters affecting their lives. A number of Fourth World Peoples' Universities are examining the questions of peace, human rights, democracy and development on the basis of the practical experience of the most underprivileged families.

In these forums, where poor and non-poor citizens meet on a footing of equality, scientific data on poverty are contrasted with the experience and the views of the populations concerned.

Attention is also drawn to the fact that the Fourth World NGO Committee at the United Nations which, since 1978, has constituted a meeting place at Geneva for many non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, has set up a working group on the study entitled Human Rights and Extreme Poverty, with the aim of communicating the testimony of their members who are working in the field with poverty-stricken families throughout the world, and also of making a contribution to the study.

2. Historical and scientific knowledge

(a) Father Wresinski and the volunteers and permanent staff of the Movement have been reporting, for the last 35 years, on the lives, the thoughts, the activities, the hopes and the efforts of the poorest people in all parts of the world. These reports have made possible the preparation of monographs on individuals, families and groups, extending over several generations. These monographs are based on dialogue with the persons concerned. Some fifty have already been published. As a result of this activity it has been possible to locate the events within a history, the history of individuals and their environment, to show what the life of the impoverished means and to reveal the unending sequence of precarious situations, as well as the mechanisms that perpetuate deprivation of human rights within a social group or a larger community. These monographs, based on Joseph Wresinski's experience and dialogue with the impoverished, reveal the forces of resistance to poverty and open the way to greater knowledge and to joint efforts with a larger population group.

(b) On this basis, the Movement's Research and Training Institute on Human Relations, established in 1961, has produced many studies, not only on the cultural, economic and historical situation of the extremely poor, but also on the dynamics of social change. These studies were prepared in cooperation with poverty-stricken families. The Institute has also produced, on a regular basis, publications dealing with different topics and ideas (see the bibliographical data that can be supplied by the Institute).

3. Father Joseph Wresinksi's experience and ideas

(a) Many studies, books, articles and lectures by Joseph Wresinksi, which contribute to our understanding of the lives of the extremely poor, provide us with ideas on numerous topics, such as the links between poverty and peace, human rights, democracy, development and the role which people can play. They also transmit to us experience of practical measures for reaching the poorest people and providing them with the means to be partners in the achievement of human rights for all (see bibilography).

(b) The "Wresinski initiative"

Father Wresinski, a member of France's Economic and Social Council, tried out, at his own request, a novel approach that was approved by the Council as a whole and is reflected in the report "Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale" (1987). This approach is enabling France to tackle the issue of poverty even in its most persistent forms, on the basis of experience of the lives lived by the extremely poor, and to develop strategies that are within the nation's capabilities and correspond to its determination to make progress towards the achievement of human rights for all. This programme is being carried out with the participation of persons living in extreme poverty and of all the partners in society. The "Wresinski approach", which has been tried in France, is also currently being followed by the Council of Europe and countries in other regions are also showing an interest in it. Various United Nations organs have made reference to this approach (see, in particular, the various reports by Mr. Danilo Türk on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights).

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